The Phonograph and the Graft

By O. HENRY

Copyright by S. S. McClure Co.

LOOKED in at the engine room of the Bloomfield-Cater Manufacturing company, limited, for the engineer was Cirksy, and there was a golden half hour between the time he shut down steam and washed up that I coveted. I found Kirksy resting, with his pipe lit, smut faced and blue overalled.

"'Tis a fair afternoon," I said, "but

blds to be colder."

"Did I ever tell you," began Kirksy honorably, "about the time Henry Horsecollar and me took a phonograph to South America?" And I felt ashamed of my subterfuge and dropped into the wooden chair he kicked toward me.

"Henry was a quarter breed, quarterback Cherokee, educated east in the idioms of football and west in contraband whisky, and a gentleman, same as you or me. He was easy and romping in his ways; a man about six foot, with a kind of rubber tire movement.

"Henry and me met at Texarkana and figured out this phonograph scheme. He had \$360 which came to him out of a land allotment in the reservation. I had run down from Little Rock on account of a distressful scene I had witnessed on the street there. A man stood on a box and passed around some gold watches, screw case, stem winders, Elgin movement, very elegant. Twenty bucks they cost you over the counter. At \$3 the crowd fought for the tickers. The man happened to find a vallee full of them handy, and he passed them out like putting hot biscuits on a plate. The backs were hard to unscrew, but the crowd put its ear to the case, and they ticked mollifying and agreeable. Three of those watches were genuine tickers, but the rest, they were only kickers.

"Hey? Why, empty cases, with one of them horny black bugs that fly around electric lights in 'em. Them bugs kick off minutes and seconds industrious and beautiful. The man I was speaking of cleaned up \$288 and went away, because he knew that when It came to wind watches in Little Rock an entomologist would be needed, and he wasn't one.

So, as I say, Henry had \$360 and I had \$288. The phonograph idea was Henry's, but I took to it freely, being fond of machinery of all kinds,

"We bought a fine phonograph in Texarkana—one of the best make and half a trunkful of records. We packed up and took the T. and P. for New Orleans. From that celebrated center of molasses and disfranchised coon songs we took a steamer for-yes, I think it was South America or Mexico -I am full of inability to divulge the location of it-'tis on the rural delivery map, 'tis colored yellow on the map and branded with the literature of

"We landed on a smiling coast at a town they denounced by the name, as near as I can recollect, of Sore-toekangaroo. 'Twas a palatable enough place to look at. The houses were clean and white, sticking about among the scenery like hard boiled eggs served with lettuce. There was a block of skyscraper mountains in the suburbs, and they kept pretty quiet, like they were laying one finger on their lips and watching the town. And the sea was remarking 'Sh-sh-sh," on the beach, and now and then a ripe cocoanut would fail kerflip in the sand, and that was all there was doing.

"The captain went ashore with us and offered to conduct what he seemed to like to call the obsequies. He introduced Henry and me to the United States consul and a roan man, the head of the department of mercenary and licentious disposition, the way it read

"I touch here again a week from today,' says the captain.

"'By that time,' we told him, 'we'll be amassing wealth in the interior towns with our galvanized prima donna and correct imitations of Sousa's band excavating a march from a tin

"'Ye'll not,' says the captain. 'Ye'll be hypnotized. Any gentleman in the audience who kindly steps upon the stage and looks this country in the eye will be converted to the hypothesis that he's but a fly in the Elgin creamery. Ye'll be standing knee deep in the surf waiting for me, and your machine for making bamburger steak out of the hitherto respected art of music will be playing "There's no place like

"Henry skinned a twenty off his roll and received from the bureau of mercenary dispositions a paper bearing a red seal and a dialect story, and no

"Then we got the consul full of red wine and struck him for a horoscope. He was a thin, youngish kind of man, I should say past fifty, sort of French-Irish in his affections and puffed up with disconsolation. Yes, he was a fattened kind of a man in whom drink lay stagnant, inclined to corpulence and misery. Yes, I think he was a kind of Dutchman, being very sad and genial in his ways.

"The marvelous invention," he says, entitled the phonograph has never before invaded these shores. The people have never heard it. They would not believe it if they should. Simple hearted children of pature, progress has never condemned them to accept the work of a can opener as an overture, and ragtime might incite them to s bloody revolution. But you can try the experiment. The best chance you

have is that the populace may not ties are running it. I'm not headlined wake up when you play. There's two ways,' says the consul, 'they may take it—they may become incoriated with attention, like an Atlanta colonel listening to "Marching Through Georgia," or they will get excited and transpose the key of the music with an ax and yourselves into a dungeon. In the latter case,' says the consul, Til do my duty by cabling to the state department, and I'll wrap the stars and stripes around you when you come to be shot, and threaten them with the vengeance of the greatest gold export and financial reserve nation on earth. The flag is full of bullet holes now,' says the consul, 'made in that way. Twice before,' says the consul, 'I have cabled our government for a couple of gunboats to protect American citizens. The first time the department sent me a pair of gum boots. The other time when a man named Pease was going to be executed here. They referred that appeal to the secretary of agriculture. Let us now disturb the senor behind the bar for a subsequence of the red wine."

"Thus soliloquized the consul of Soretoe-kangaroo to me and Henry Horse-

"But, notwithstanding, we hired a room that afternoon in the Calle de los Angeles, the main street that runs along the shore, and put our trunks "Twas a good sized room, dark and cheerful, but small. 'Twas on a



"A blg, fine looking white man looked in." various street, diversified by houses and conservatory plants. The peasantry of the city passed to and fro on the fine pasturage between the sidewalks. 'Twas, for the world, like an opera chorus when the Royal Kafoozlum is about to enter.

"We were rubbing the dust off the machine and getting fixed to start business the next day when a big, fine looking white man in white clothes stopped at the door and looked in. We extended the invitations, and he walked inside and sized us up. He was chewing a long cigar and wrinkling his eyes, meditative, like a girl trying to decide which dress to wear to the

party.
"'New York?' he says to me finally. 'Originally, and from time to time,

I says. 'Hasn't it rubbed off yet?' "'It's simple,' says he, 'when you know how. It's the fit of the vest. They don't cut vests right anywhere else. Coats, maybe, but not vests. "The white man looks at Henry

Horsecollar and besitates. " 'Injun,' says Henry; 'tame Injun.'

" 'Mellinger,' says the man-'Homer P. Meilinger. Boys, you're confiscated. You're babes in the wood without a chaperon or referee, and it's my duty to start you going. I'll knock out the props and launch you proper in the pellucid waters of Sore-toe-kaugaroo. You'll have to be christened, and if you'll come with me I'll break a bottie of wine across your bows, according to Hoyle.' Well, for two days Homer P. Mel-

linger did the honors. That man cut ice in Sore-toe-kangaroo. He was It. He was the Royal Kafoozlum. If me and Henry was babes in the wood, he was a Robin Redbreast from the topmost bough. Him and me and Henry Horsecollar locked arms and toted that phonograph around and had wassail and diversion. There was vino tinto and vino blanco to drink with every tune. The aborigines bad acquirements of a pleasant thing in the way of drinks that gums itself to the recollection. They chop off the end of a green cocoanut and pour in on the liquor of it French brandy and gin. We had

them and other things. "Mine and Henry's money was counterfeit. Everything was on Homer P. Mellinger. That man could find rolls of bills in his clothes where Herrmann the Wizard couldn't have conjured out an omelet. He could have founded universities and had enough left to buy the colored vote of his country. Henry and me wondered what his graft was.

One evening he told us. "'Boys,' says he, T've deceived you. Instead of a painted butterfly, I'm the hardest worked man in this country. Ten years ago I landed on its shore: and two years ago on the point of its jaw. Yes: I reckon I can get the decision over this ginger cake commonwealth at the end of any round ! choose. I'll confide in you because you are my countrymen and guests, even if you have committed an assault upon my adopted shores with the worst ays tem of noises ever set to music.

"'My job is private necretary to the

in the bills, but I'm the mustard in the salad dressing. There isn't a law goes before congress, there isn't a concession granted, there isn't an import duty levied, but what H. P. Mellinger, he cooks and seasons it. In the front office I fill the president's inkstand and search visiting statesmen for dynamite: in the back room I dietate the policy of the government. You'd never guess how I got the pull. It's the only graft of its kind in the world. I'll put you wise. You remember the topliner in the old copy books, "Honesty is the best policy." That's it. I'm the only honest man in this republic. The government knows it; the people know it; the boodlers know it; the foreign investors know it. I make the government keep its faith. If a man is promised a job he gets it; if outside capital buys a concession they get the goods. I run a monopoly of square dealing here. There's no competition. If Colonel Diogenes were to flash his lontern in this precinct he'd have my address inside of two minutes. There isn't big money in it, but it's a sure thing and lets a man sleep of nights,'

"Thus Homer P. Mellinger made oration to me and Henry Horsecollar in Sore-toe-kangaroo. And later he divested himself of this remark:

"Boys, I'm to hold a solree this evening with a gang of leading citizens, and I want your assistance. You bring the musical corn sheller and give the affair the outside appearance of a function. There's important business on band, but it mustn't show. I can talk to you people. I've been pained for years on account of not having anybody to blow off and brag to. I get homesick sometimes, and I'd swap the entire perquisites of office for just one hour to have a stein and a caviare sandwich somewhere on Thirty-fourth street and stand and watch the street cars go by and smell the pennut roaster at old Giuseppe's fruit stand.'

"'Yes,' said I, 'there's fine caviare at Billy Renfrow's cafe, corner of Thirtyfourth and'-

"'God knows it,' interrupts Mellinger, 'and if you'd told me you knew Billy Renfrow I'd have invented tons of ways of making you happy. Billy . was my side kicker in New York. That is a man who never knew what crooked was. Here I am working honesty for a graft, but that man loses money on it. Carrambos! I get sick at times of this country. Everything's rotten. From the executive down to the coffee pickers they're plotting to down each other and skin their friends. If a mule driver takes off his hat to an official, . that man figures it out that he's a popular idol and sets his pegs to stir . up a revolution and upset the administration. It's one of my little chores as private secretary to smell out these revolutions and affix the kibosh before they break out and scratch the paint off the government property. That's why I'm down here now in this mildewed coast town. The governor of the district and his crew are plotting

programme to happen to them." "We three were sitting at table in the canting of the Purified Saints Mellinger poured out wine and was looking some worried. I was thinking.

"They're a sharp crowd," he says, kind of fretful. 'They're capitalized by a foreign syndicate after rubber. and they're loaded to the muzzle for 'of comic opera. I want to smell East river and wear suspenders again. At times I feel like throwing up my tob. but I'm fool enough to be sort of proud of it. "There's Mellinger," they say here: "por Dios, you can't touch him with a million!" I'd like to take that record back and show it to Billy Renfrow some day, and that tightens my grip whenever I see a fat thing that I could corral just by winking one eye and losing my graft. By George, they can't monkey with me; they know It! What money I get I make honest and spend it. Some day I'll make a pile and go back and eat caviare with Billy. Tonight I'll show you how to handle a bunch of corruptionists. I'll show them what Mellinger, private secretary, means when you spell it with the cotton and tissue paper off."

"Mellinger appears shaky and breaks his glass against the neck of the bottle. "I says to myself, 'White man, if I'm not mistaken, there's been a bait laid out where the tail of your eye could

"That night, according to arrangements, me and Henry took the phonograph to a room in a 'dobe house in a dirty side street, where the grass was knee high. "I'was a long room, lit with smoky oil lamps. There was plenty of chairs and a table at the back end.

"By and by the invitations to the musicale came sliding in by pairs and threes and spade flushes. Their color was of a diversity, running from a three days' smoked meerschaum to a patent leather polish. They were as polite as wax, being devastated with enjoyments to give Senor Mellinger the good evenings. I understood their Spanish talk-I ran a pumping engine two years in a Mexican silver mine and had it pat-but I never let on.

"Maybe fifty of 'em had come and was sented, when in slid the king bee, the governor of the district. Mellinger met him at the door and escorted him to the grand stand. When I saw that Latin man I knew that Mellinger, private secretary, had all the dances on his eard taken. That was a big. squashy man, the color of a rubber overshoe, and he had an eye like a

head walter's. "Mellinger explained, fluent, in the Castilian idioms, that the soul was disconcerted with joy at introducing to

Maxwell Land Grant Co

MINERAL LANDS

Extensive Areas of High and low grade Ore awaiting Development

Gold Silver Copper Iron

Our Mining Regulations are very favorable to the Prospector. These Regulations apply to all Mineral Lands contained within the Boundaries of the Grant in New Mexico except reservations indicated on the mineral maps published by the Company

Within this reservation Special Arrangements will be made with parties desiring a large acreage and who are prepared to develop the same

All Conditions

are favorable to the success of the District

For further information write

The Maxwell Land Grant Company

CIMARRON. NEW MEXICO

to uprise. I've got every one of their Henry got the cue and run on an elenames, and they're invited to listen to the phonograph tonight, compliments tivities became initiated. The governof H. P. M. That's the way I'll get or man has a bit of English under his them in a bunch, and things are on the hat, and when the music was choked off he says:

American gentleemen, the so esplendeed moosle as to playee.'

side of it. I was just wondering how Mellinger was going to handle his crowd, when the home talent suddenly opened the services. That governor man was suitable for uprisings and policies. I judge be

was a ready kind of man, who took his own time.

" 'Do the American senors understand Spanish? he asked in his native ac-

"'They do not,' says Mellinger. " 'Then listen,' goes on the Latin man prompt. 'The musics are of sufficient prettiness, but not of necessity. Let us speak of business. I well know why we are here, since I observe my compatriots. You had a whisper yesterday, Senor Mellinger, of our proposals. Tonight we will speak out. that you stand in the president's favor, and we know your influence. The government will be changed. We know the worth of your services. We esteem your friendship and aid so much that' -Mellinger raises his hand, but the governor man bottles him up. 'Do not speak until I have done."

The governor man then draws a package wrapped in paper from his pocket and lays it on the table by Mellinger's hand.

'In that you will find \$100,000 in money of your country. You can do nothing against us, but you can be worth that for us. Go back to the capital and obey our instructions. Take that money now. We trust you. You will find with it a paper giving in detail the work you will be expected to do for us. Do not have the unwise-

ness to refuse. The governor man paused, with his eyes fixed on Mellinger, full of expressions and observances. I looked at Mellinger and was glad Billy Renfrow couldn't see him then. The sweat was popping out on his forehead, and he stood dumb, tapping the little package with the ends of his fingers. The Colorado maduro gang was after his graft. He had only to change his polities and stuff six figures in his inside

"Henry whispers to me and wants the pause in the programme interpreted. I whisper back, H. P. is against a bribe, senator's size, and the coons have got him going.' I saw Mellinger's hand moving closer to the package. 'He's weakening,' I whispered to Henry. 'We'll remind him,' says Henry, 'of the peanut rosster on

Thirty-fourth street, New York.' "Henry stooped and got a record

est invention, the wonder of the age. from the basketful we'd brought, slid struct the legislation of Mellinger. You gant brass band record, and the fes- off. It was a cornet solo, very neat and beautiful, and the name of it was fifty odd men in the room moved while "The table was a long one, and Henry away from the package. Not until wall. The governor sat at the other and then Homer P. Mellinger takes up end. Homer P. Mellinger stood at the the bundle of boodle and siams it in little girls do when they play. the governor man's face,

'That's my answer,' says Mellinger. private secretary, 'and there'll be another in the morning. I have proofs of conspiracy against every man of The show is over, gentlemen.'

"'There's one more act,' puts in the overnor man. 'You are a servant. I believe, employed by the president to



copy letters and answer raps at the door. I am governor here. Senors, I call upon you in the name of the cause to seize this man!"

"That brindled gang of conspirators shoved back their chairs and advanced in force. I could see where Mellinger had made a mistake in massing his enemy so as to make a grand stand play. I think he made another one, too, but we can pass that, Mellinger's idea of graft and mine being different, according to estimations and points of view.

There was only one window and deor in that room, and they were in the front end. Here was fifty odd Latin men coming in a bunch to ob-

it in the phonograph and started her may say there was three of us, for me and Henry, simultaneous, declared New York city and the Cherokee Na-'Home, Sweet Home.' Not one of them tion in sympathy with the weaker party.

"Then it was that Henry Horsecollar it was playing, and the governor man rose to a point of disorder and inter-'Ver-r-ree fine. Gr-r-racias, the kept his eyes steady on Mellinger. I vened, showing admirable the advansaw Mellinger's head go up little by tages of education as applied to the little, and his hand came creeping American Indian's natural intellect and native refinement. He stood up and me sat at the end of it next the the last note sounded did anybody stir, and smoothed back his bair on each side with his hands as you have seen

"'Get behind me, both of you,' says Henry.

"'What is it to be?' I asked. "'I'm going to buck center,' says Henry, in his football idioms. 'There isn't a tackle in the lot of them. Keep close behind me and rush the game."

"That cultured red man exhaled an arrangement of sounds with his mouth that caused the Latin aggregation to pause with thoughtfulness and hesitations. The matter of his proclamation seemed to be a co-operation of the Cherokee college yell with the Carlisle war whoop, . He went at the chocolate team like the flip of a little boy's nigger shooter. His right elbow laid out the governor man on the gridiron, and he made a lane the length of the crowd that a woman could have carried a stepladder through without striking anything. All me and Mellinger had to do was to follow.

"In five minutes we were out of that street and at the military headquarters, where Mellinger had things his own way.

"The next day Mellinger takes me and Henry to one side and begins to shed tens and twenties.

"'I want to buy that phonograph, he says. 'I liked that last tune it played. Now, you boys better go back home, for they'll give you trouble here before I can get the screws put on 'em. If you happen to ever see Billy Renfrow again, tell him I'm coming back to New York as soon as I can make a stake-honest!

"This is more money,' says I, 'than the machine is worth.'

"'Tis government expense money." says Mellinger, 'and the government's getting the tune grinder cheap." "Henry and I knew that pretty well,

but we never let Homer P. Mellinger know that we had seen how near he came to losing his graft. "We laid low until the day the steamer came back. When we saw the

captain's boat on the beach me and Henry went down and stood in the edge of the water. The captain gripned when he saw us.

"'I told you you'd be waitin',' he says. 'Where's the Hamburger machine?

"'It stays behind,' I says, 'to play 'Home, Sweet Home."

"'I told you so,' says the captain again. 'Climb in the boat.'

"And that," said Kirksy, "is the way me and Henry Horsecollar introduced the phonograph in that Latin country